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SUBJECT: ELYSEE READOUT ON LEBANESE PM SINIORA'S FEBRUARY  
21 MEETINGS IN PARIS

Classified By: A/DCM Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4. (b), (d).

¶1. (C) French Presidency NEA adviser Boris Boillon on 26 February provided a quick readout of Lebanese Prime Minister Siniora's February 21 meetings with French President Sarkozy and Prime Minister Fillon. Boillon stressed that the main message was one of French support to Lebanon's head of government and acting head of state in a way that underscored the legitimacy of the Lebanese state. The visit was brief, and the meetings confined to Sarkozy and Fillon. (Comment: Kouchner's absence from France ruled out a possible separate Siniora meeting with him. End comment)

¶2. (C) According to Boillon, Sarkozy asked Siniora for a rundown of the situation in Lebanon and whether there was anything new that might break the longstanding impasse. Both leaders agreed that the Arab League initiative remained the only game in town, and Sarkozy pledged continued French support. Boillon said that Sarkozy reviewed French efforts with Syria to secure agreement on a new Lebanese president and promised that France had abandoned that approach in the face of Syrian dishonesty and the intransigence of March 8. The two leaders agreed on the necessity of maintaining pressure on Syria (as well as Iran) via support for the rapid establishment of the Special Tribunal, use of the Arab summit as leverage over Damascus, and the formulation of a solid EU position regarding further high-level political contact with Syria over the coming weeks.

¶3. (C) Regarding the Arab summit, Boillon claimed the French have now seen evidence that the Syrians are "more interested" than they had been in seeing the summit occur as planned in Damascus. He claimed signs of preparation were evident in the city, and FM Mu'allim was traveling to other Arab capitals. As for the issue of getting the EU to adopt a tough common position on contact with Syria, Boillon acknowledged that this would remain a major challenge. France was trying to secure agreement that Solana would be the only channel for high-level contacts with the Syrian regime. He described the UK as "solid," but Spain and Italy, with elections approaching, continued to be troublesome. Germany, Boillon added, was also difficult because of what he called Chancellor Merkel's "Steinmeier problem."

¶4. (C) In tandem with the political support France sought to convey, Boillon noted the signature of an accord providing for a 15-year, 375-million Euro bilateral budget assistance package meant as France's fulfillment of a pledge made at the Paris III donors conference in early 2007. As reported in the media, the first tranche of 150 million Euros was

disbursed the same day. Boillon stated that in addition to this assistance, France was providing aid to the Lebanese Armed Forces. He refused, however, to provide details of that assistance except to say that it was a combination of programmed and impromptu help.

¶5. (C) With respect to French efforts on Lebanon, Boillon stated that the days of the Elysee dealing directly with Lebanese intermediaries representing March 8 were over. He stressed France's firm attachment to the Arab League initiative, even though he acknowledged little current reason to believe it was on the verge of ushering in a breakthrough.

Boillon, with some exasperation, observed that only the Lebanese were capable of resolving their crisis. He hoped that continued Egyptian and Saudi pressure on Syria through use of the Arab summit as a lever would eventually cause the Lebanese to "act like adults." He was not optimistic, however, given the news about the failure of ALSYG Amr Musa's latest trip to Beirut and the latest postponement of the presidential election.

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